

ANONYMITY OR NOT?

I've been thinking about the issue of speaking openly with the press when interview opportunities arise. The big question is whether or not to allow the use of our names, as the perception of "stigma" associated with our family's problem is of some concern. As a business professional in a very conservative environment, I clearly have a reputation and an image to maintain, consistent with the responsibilities of my job; so naturally, I have had to consider the impact of allowing our names to be used in a public forum.

I am convinced that the "stigma" on families affected by drug dependency and substance abuse is more self-imposed than societal. It wasn't too many years ago that there was a "stigma" associated with bankruptcy; likewise divorce; likewise losing a job. Those days are over. So also is the "stigma" of having a family member affected by addiction. I believe the trend toward societal understanding, empathy, compassion, sympathy and support began when Betty Ford bravely and openly admitted her problem and set out to solve it way back in the 1970's. Over 25 years have passed and our families, friends, business associates and church congregations have become significantly more tolerant as substance abuse has invaded more and more "regular" families. At work, I have shared many of our experiences with my boss, human resources, senior executives and members of our board of directors and have had total support and expressions of understanding on all fronts. I do not believe that we are stigmatized by any of this.

So, when the opportunity to lend credibility to our comments to the press is presented in the form of using our names, I say go ahead. If anyone reading the newspaper story is shocked, revulsed, or otherwise negatively affected to the point that he or she would think less of us, then it is the reader, not us, who has the problem.

Just my opinion.....